

Documenting the Me'phaa genus (tcf and others): Project Summary

This project will undertake a broad and multifaceted documentation and description of the Me'phaa genus (Otomanguean family; Guerrero, Mexico), including digital recordings (video and audio), vocabulary, grammar, and texts, and provide the basis for ongoing language development and linguistic study.

Intellectual Merit

Me'phaa (formerly known to outsiders as Tlapanec) is a language genus that is part of the extensive and increasingly known, described, and documented Otomanguean language family. While not endangered to the extent of some languages in Mesoamerica, the Me'phaa branch of Otomanguean is (like other languages of Mexico) under stress from sociological factors that put it at risk. It is comparatively much less well known than other Otomanguean languages — in fact, it is still listed by the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 2009 as being “generally accepted” by the experts as a Hokan language. Language shift is being witnessed right now, either from Me'phaa to Spanish or from one dialect of Me'phaa to another. This underscores the importance of much more significant documentation across the genus while the outlying communities (some much smaller than others) may be sampled and contribute to the overall picture. The Me'phaa genus has many interesting features that are still relatively unknown and insufficiently documented.

The P.I. of the project, Stephen Marlett, has worked on Otomanguean languages previously (usually assisting others to bring work to publication stage, and often with native speakers). Most recently he has begun to interact with a group of Me'phaa men and women as well as with SIL colleagues in the area. All are interested in seeing a significant project such as this begun. The P.I. will help the group interact with people working in other scientific fields (botany, ornithology, etc.) to provide more interesting and complete documentation of the culture.

Broader impact

More complete documentation of Me'phaa will be an important contribution to the linguistic community both generally and for the study of proto-Otomanguean. It will also be a contribution to the Me'phaa community as parts of it will be published in Spanish (as well as English). The materials will be available to the Me'phaa community that uses Spanish as their language of wider communication. It will also use the Me'phaa alphabet (as well as the IPA in the case of phonology and morphology). The publications and public presentations in Mexico will be an important link between this project and three communities in particular: the Me'phaa teachers and writers, who will be given new resources; new researchers (from different disciplines), who will be informed and given a clearer understanding of the language and the special features that it has; and the general public of Mexico, which is quite uninformed about Me'phaa.

Documenting the Me'phaa genus (tcf and others)

1. Project description

This project will undertake a broad and multifaceted documentation and description of the Me'phaa genus (Otomanguean family), including digital recordings (video and audio), vocabulary, grammar, and texts, and provide the basis for ongoing language development and linguistic study.

2. The Me'phaa language: context and sociolinguistics

Me'phaa (formerly known to outsiders as Tlapanec) is a language genus (Dryer 1989) that is part of the extensive and increasingly known, described, and documented Otomanguean language family. It is spoken in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, by approximately 98,500 speakers (INEGI 2005) over the age of five. The genus is represented by several closely related varieties (Egland 1978), some of which are listed by name in the Ethnologue (Lewis 2009): Acatepec Me'phaa, Azoyú Me'phaa, Malinaltepec Me'phaa, Tlacoapa Mep'haa, and Subtiaba (a variety spoken in Nicaragua until the early twentieth century, Lehmann 1920). Four other varieties are identified and listed by the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI 2008), reflecting divisions well known to Me'phaa speakers. Relevant facts are shown in table 1 (information taken from the draft on the phonology of the genus, in preparation by the P.I. and several Me'phaa co-authors; some data need to be verified).

Me'phaa has only been definitively classified as part of the Otomanguean family since work by Rensch (1977) and Suárez (1979) challenged a hypothesis (Sapir 1925) that had put it in the Hokan family (with Otomanguean features by contact). Campbell (1997) considers the Otomanguean classification established “beyond any reasonable doubt” (p. 325), and cites unpublished work (p. 158) by Kaufmann that categorizes Me'phaa as a sister of the extinct Manguean group, and Tlapanec-Manguean as a sister of the Oto-Pame-Chinantecan branch, the exclusive members of so-called Western Otomanguean. Further work on tying Me'phaa into Otomanguean has not been published, if indeed it has been done. (Despite this work, the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2009) bizarrely continues to say that the classification of Tlapanec as a Hokan language is “generally accepted” and basically challenged only by a Rensch, a “U.S. missionary linguist”, ignoring the important contribution by Suárez.)

Compared to the other branches of Otomanguean, Me'phaa is relatively undocumented. Aside from a few very significant items — most importantly a general

and substantive work by Suárez (1983) on the Malinaltepec variety (based on work with one speaker living in Mexico City), a doctoral dissertation by Wichmann (1996a) plus a number of other shorter works by Wichmann (1993a, 1993b, 1996b, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) on the southernmost, most different, and most endangered extant variety (Azoyú), and an M.A. thesis by Me'phaa speaker Carrasco Zúñiga (2006) on the Malinaltepec variety — there is little accessible published work on Me'phaa. Most importantly, little

Table 1: The Me'phaa varieties					
Autoethnonym	Name of the traditional center town for the language subgroup	Autoglottonym	Name used by INALI	Name in the Ethnologue	ISO 639-3 code
xabu mínguun	Mínguín (Tlacoapa) 17.1500, -98.8667	mi'phaa [mĩʔp ^h àà]	tlapaneco del centro	Tlacoapa Me'phaa	tpl
xabo Mañuwjín	Mañuwjín (Malinaltepec) 17.0500, -98.6667	me'phaa [mèʔp ^h àà]	tlapaneco central bajo	Malinaltepec Me'phaa	tcf
xabu wí'jín	Wí'jín (Acatepec) 16.7500, -98.4833	me'paa [mēʔpàà]	tlapaneco del suroeste	Acatepec Me'phaa	tpx
xabu xma'ñun	Xma'ín (San Lucas de Teocuitlapa) 17.35, -98.9250	me'phaa [mēʔp ^h āā]	tlapaneco del noroeste bajo		
	Tsindí (Azoyú) 16.7330, -98.5980	?	tlapaneco del sur	Azoyú Me'phaa	tpc
	Xirágáa (Zapotitlán Tablas) 17.2167, -98.9833	?	tlapaneco del norte		
	Marúxíi (Nanzintla) 17.3333, -99.0833	?	tlapaneco del oeste		
	Bátháa (Zilacayotitlán) 17.2944, -98.5489	?	tlapaneco del este		
	Aguaa (Huitzapula) 17.4167, -99.8167	?	tlapaneco del noroeste alto		
				Subtiaba	sut

has been acquired or archived (virtually nothing in the archive in Austin (AILLA), for example) in terms of texts, whether audio or video. There is no published, substantive analysis of the phonology that is easily accessible either by native speakers or outsiders. Some material is available from older sources and various other small or hard to access publications. See Lehmann (1920), Comité de Desarrollo de la Lengua Mèphàà (2001 manuscript, 2003, 2004 manuscript), Radin (1933, 1940), Schultze-Jena (1938), and Suárez (1979, 1986, 1988). See also Carrasco Zúñiga (1995).

In terms of raw numbers of speakers, Me'phaa is in much better condition than many languages north of the U.S.-Mexico border. However, it is in a precarious situation for various factors. Many young people have left or are leaving their hometowns, state, and country in search of better economic opportunities. Those who stay are dealing with an educational system that in actuality offers real opportunity only in Spanish. And even when education is offered in the Me'phaa language, the socio-educational dominance of one particular variety (Malinaltepec) in the teacher corps has meant that in some other dialectal areas the parents have reacted negatively to the degree that they have insisted that Me'phaa not be used at all, thus giving Spanish-language education an even greater dominance. At the same, slight improvements in economic conditions have resulted in the incursion of television into the homes of many people who live in the small towns, thereby reducing the role of Me'phaa in the social life of children. Linguistic differences within the genus have frustrated language unification efforts, and speakers have often viewed such efforts negatively. Positive trends that can be pointed to include the strong use of the language in the lower grades of the school system and in its use in the churches that promote singing and reading. Both of these trends contribute to the accessibility of some very capable Me'phaa men and women who are able and interested to be involved in reading and writing their language.

While the historical dialectal varieties are quite well established, in recent years there has been considerable influence from Malinaltepec through the bilingual schoolteacher corps and materials that have been prepared for use throughout the Me'phaa area. This has resulted in some lexical replacement happening as well as some shift in pronunciation by younger people — not without resistance by many people in the non-Malinaltepec dialects.

3. Importance of this research

Me'phaa is an interesting language in many ways, as it combines some of the key phonological features of Otomanguan languages in general in its own way: tone,

contrastive nasalization, the ubiquitous glottal stop and fricative, and vowel length. The Me'phaa “takes” on these features of Me'phaa have not made their way into the general phonological literature, however, because they are not described in any detail and not well understood. The role of the minimal word constraint has not been explored, but seems to be relevant. There is no word stress, at least with typical correlates. However, the last two syllables of words are of special interest. The vowel of the penultimate syllable is often slightly longer than the ultimate, but the ultimate is structurally the most complicated. The distribution of some phonemes and allophones is also related to their place in the penultimate syllables. (The increasing influence of Spanish because of increasing bilingualism means that some phonetic features are already being affected, and so postponement of the documentation of these facts would only complicate the job of addressing them properly.)

The basic descriptions of these and other phonological issues that are available do not agree, and other issues are not mentioned at all. The same is quite true of most other aspects of the morphology and syntax of the genus. Important problems need to be addressed despite the important groundwork laid by Suárez and Wichmann for two varieties.

The proposed project would make significant amounts of new data available in ways that are very accessible. It would thus help fill a large gap in our knowledge of the Otomanguean language family. Quite importantly, unpublished research by colleagues of the P.I. would be integrated into the final product (with their encouragement and permission), and so the work would not begin from zero.

These issues that relate to the intellectual merit of the project are appropriately addressed before the language enters into a more critical period. As mentioned above, the language still counts with a good number of speakers and thus is not critically endangered at present. But the vitality of the language is threatened by changing social factors that are already altering the linguistic picture.

4. Impact of this research

One impact of the research will be on general Otomanguean research, both comparative and historical. The role of Me'phaa in this research so far has been marginal, and access to significant data is limited.

Me'phaa has the potential for providing key data relating to the analysis of tone, both generally and for the study of proto-Otomanguean. The same is true for the study of

nasalization and phonation types within Otomanguean and cross-linguistically. (Me'phaa distinguishes between nasalized vowels and heavily nasalized vowels, the former coming from contrastive nasalization on the root and the latter from morphological nasalization.)

The project will have an impact for the speakers of the language itself because it will help provide the descriptive base needed for ongoing language development. The Me'phaa schoolteachers are already in contact with each other and working on comparative studies of some sort, with important leadership from Abad Carrasco Zúñiga (a Me'phaa researcher, not a teacher), but they generally do not have the training to carry these projects beyond a very basic form. Teachers do have quite regular meetings that are conducted like group workshops; these would be appropriate venues, perhaps, for communicating the results of some of the research on the language and to invite wider participation. Attempts would also be made to make some presentations at the Guerrero extension of the National Pedagogical University.

The project should also have an impact more broadly within linguistics in Mexico. Presently there are no Mexican linguists or linguistic students (that the P.I. is aware of) other than Carrasco Zúñiga who are working on the language, and no development within the country of any expertise in the language. Carrasco Zúñiga has stressed to me the importance of increasing the place of Me'phaa in the state of Guerrero where no ongoing research is taking place on the language within any educational institution.

The P.I. has been involved in small ways with Me'phaa in recent years and has been asked by a group of Me'phaa (including Carrasco Zúñiga) to become more integrally linked to their work. These young men and women have been trained by an SIL team (Mark and Esther Weathers, and Charles Speck) in the writing of their language (according to their individual varieties). They are able to use computers with considerable skill, are bilingual in Spanish, and are quite adaptable to each other's varieties of Me'phaa during discussions (having become bidialectal to some degree). They are able to write tone with ease, and in fact the writers of all varieties have insisted that tone be written (unlike what has happened in many other Otomanguean languages).

The P.I. has had extensive experience in working with native language community members in Mexico, from teaching linguistic courses in formal programs where they are the students as well as less formal workshop situations and one-on-one mentoring. In order to become more prepared to deal with the tones of Me'phaa and other languages of Mexico, he audited a course on tone analysis taught in 2009 by Keith Snider

(specialist on tone languages of Africa). He has published articles on phonology, morphology and syntax of Otomanguean languages (primarily Mixtec and Zapotec, more recently working on Amuzgo).

5. Previous research

It has already been mentioned that some important research on Me'phaa has been done, most notably by Suárez (1983), by Wichmann (1996a and other work listed in the bibliography, on the southernmost variety), by Carrasco Zúñiga (2006), and Weathers & Carrasco Zúñiga (1989). SIL field linguist Mark Weathers has spent more than thirty years in the area and has a considerable amount of field notes on the language, as well as having become a fluent speaker of the Malinaltepec variety. SIL field linguist Charles Speck has been working in the Acatepec variety for the past several years and also has been collecting data (especially verb paradigms).

The P.I.'s first experience with Me'phaa took place during a year in which speakers of various indigenous languages of the Americas took two semesters of studies in a program offered in 2006 in Lima, Peru, at the Universidad Ricardo Palma. The P.I. was an instructor, and Carrasco Zúñiga, mentioned above, was a participant. Much more recently, the P.I. was asked by SIL to spend ten days with the group of men and women mentioned above, who range in age from their early twenties to their early fifties. During that workshop the participants (who included Carrasco Zúñiga) spent time generating texts, vocabulary lists by semantic domains, and recordings that would be usable in local literacy programs and also for archiving. The group worked on phonological analysis (to confirm and refine the analyses presented in Suárez 1983 and Carrasco Zúñiga 2006), and to explore activities that would provide new textual material and vocabulary. The results of this ten-day workshop are listed in the bibliography as Apolinar Antonio (in preparation a, b). The first of these is likely to be published electronically in some format before the year 2009 is over. The phonological write-up will require more work before it is ready to publish, but it will be novel in that it will present a general as well as a dialect-specific picture of the phonology of Me'phaa.

6. NSF-sponsored research during the past five years

An NSF grant, "Seri Dictionary and Texts" (BCS-0110676), facilitated the completion of a major trilingual dictionary and a corpus of glossed texts. This grant (2002-2004, extended through 2005) enabled the P.I. and his research associate Mary B. Moser to accomplish several important goals. The first, of course, was the dictionary itself. It is one of the largest (943 pages, including the grammar sketch) and most comprehensive

dictionaries on a language of Mexico, as well as one of the most useful in that its design permits significant use by the Seri people, Spanish speakers and also English speakers. It was completed with the crucial involvement of many Seri people. Mexican and non-Mexican scientists also had important roles in the production. An artist prepared more than 600 illustrations for the book that provide important and interesting cultural information. The dictionary was published primarily with funds from the Mexican government through the Universidad de Sonora and the Instituto Sonorense de Cultura — crucially made possible by a small amount of NSF money designated for purchasing or subsidizing copies for the Seri people. Reference: Mary B. Moser & Stephen A. Marlett (2005) *Comcáac quih yaza quih hant ihíp hac: diccionario seri-español-inglés*, Hermosillo and Mexico City: Universidad de Sonora and Plaza y Valdés Editores. Today it is made available electronically through the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (where it is archived) and also the SIL-Mexico website. The glossed texts, with recordings, are made available through a website (www.lengamer.org) as well as through the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America.

An NEH-NSF fellowship in 2007 (under the Documenting Endangered Languages program) was focused on the completion of a reference grammar of Seri FN-50007-06). The grammar, nearly one thousand pages long at present, is essentially written. Recordings have been made of the data that appear in it. The manuscript has been posted on the P.I.'s faculty website (University of North Dakota) while ancillary projects have been undertaken and related publications have been completed. The next step is to finish another revision and find a publisher. Editing is currently in process.

Other publications that have resulted directly or indirectly from these previous projects include the following:

Gerdts, Donna B. & Marlett, Stephen A. 2008. The form and function of denominal verb constructions. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 74.4: 409-422.

Marlett, Stephen A. 2004. El diccionario comunitario y dinámico como palanca en el fortalecimiento de la identidad etnolingüística. *Lengua y Sociedad* 7.2: 89-101.

Marlett, Stephen A. 2005. A typological overview of the Seri language. *Linguistic Discovery* 3.1: 54-73.

Marlett, Stephen A. 2006. Acento, extrametricalidad y la palabra mínima en seri. *Encuentro de lenguas indígenas americanas: Libro de actas*. Santa Rosa de La Pampa, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de La Pampa

- Marlett, Stephen A. 2006. La evolución del alfabeto seri. Octavo Encuentro Internacional de Lingüística en el Noroeste, Vol. 3, ed. María del Carmen Morúa. Hermosillo: Editorial UniSon, 311-325.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2007. Bringing it home: the implications of documentation for a vibrant endangered language. Proceedings of conference on language documentation and linguistic theory, eds. Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond and David Nathan, pp. 157-163. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2008. The phasal verb construction in Seri. Proceedings of the Conference on Indigenous Languages of Latin America-III (25-27 October 2007). Austin: University of Texas.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2008. Stress, extrametricality and the minimal word in Seri. *Linguistic Discovery* 6.1.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2008. Denominal verbs in Seri. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 74.4: 471-488.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2008. The Seri and Salinan connection revisited. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 74.3: 393–99.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2008. The form and use of names in Seri. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 74.1: 47-82
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2009. Semantic and syntactic subcategorization in Seri: Recipients and addressees. In Donna B. Gerdts, John C. Moore and Maria Polinsky (eds.), *Hypothesis A/Hypothesis B: Linguistic explorations in honor of David M. Perlmutter*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Marlett, Stephen A. In press. Introduction to and translation of “Leatherback sea turtle: Xiica cmotomanoj” by René Montaña Herrera. In David Kozak (ed.) *Inside dazzling mountains*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Marlett, Stephen A. In press. Introduction to and translation of “Those who had Hast Quita as their birthplace” by Lorenzo Herrera Casanova. In David Kozak (ed.) *Inside dazzling mountains*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Marlett, Stephen A. In press. Introduction to and translation of “Twin Peaks: Hast Cacöla” by Francisco Xavier Moreno Herrera. In David Kozak (ed.) *Inside dazzling mountains*. University of Nebraska Press.

Marlett, Stephen A.; Moreno Herrera, F. Xavier & Herrera Astorga, Genaro G. 2005.
Seri. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 35.1: 117-121.

Marlett, Stephen A.; Moreno Herrera, F. Xavier & Herrera Astorga, Genaro G. 2006.
Seri. *Ilustraciones fonéticas de lenguas amerindias*, ed. by Stephen A. Marlett. Lima:
SIL International and Universidad Ricardo Palma.

The P.I. has also been acting as a consultant to Seri authors who have prepared texts for publication in an anthology of indigenous literature (see the “in press” references above) and a small Seri vocabulary for use in the schools (a spin-off of the 2005 dictionary). The time during the two projects mentioned above facilitated the research by the P.I.’s wife on the Seri knowledge of mollusks; that significant work is about completed. The work has continued to have an impact on biological work in the region (research that now includes Seri co-authors and the use of the Seri language), including plants (work by Wilder, Felger and others), birds (work by Morales and Velarde), and sea life (work by Basurto, Narchi Narchi, and Torre), as well as ecology more generally. Such interaction with specialists in the local ecology has been of importance to the Mexican government, and as a result the P.I. and his wife were invited by the government to help the Seris register some of their territory under the international Ramsar Convention for protecting wetlands. Archeological work by Bowen (see a recent publication by the Arizona State Museum) has been informed and influenced by the recent work. And finally, work by Anderson on names (published by Oxford University Press) included reference to Seri at the same level as English, French, and Greek. The P.I. taught a one-week intensive course on the grammar of Seri at the Universidad de Sonora in February 2009, and has been invited to do the same at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City in the next few months. The time in the field during those projects has also facilitated interaction between him and other, younger researchers (American and Mexican) who are taking advantage of the easily accessible and reliable information. In 2008 the P.I. was invited to apply for, and then received, a grant from the Christensen Fund on behalf of local Seri literacy efforts by supporting Seri writers and writing workshops. In that regard, he is currently acting as a consultant and is helping develop an on-line course to teach Seri writing that will be available to interested young people. (The local Seri schools continue to not teach the language and no local mode of delivery is currently functioning other than the internet.) During that year the P.I. was asked by a Seri elder to videotape him as he told stories, to archive on his behalf (in the Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America). Finally, the P.I. has been contacted by a writer for a major magazine about the relationship

between endangered languages and the environment, for an article that is in progress and in which Seri may be highlighted.

Interdisciplinary cooperation such as that reviewed above is possible and anticipated with the Me'phaa project. In fact, preliminary contact has already been made with one Mexican ornithologist in this regard since in one two-hour session the workshop group generated a list of more than sixty bird names. In a time when ecological matters are of even more obvious importance, the information that local cultures have about their environment must be documented as well. Logging and other interests in Guerrero continue to have a negative impact on the local ecosystems, and thus have a deleterious effect on the people themselves.

7. Goals of the Me'phaa documentation and description project

The project would tackle documentation and description of the Me'phaa genus simultaneously, laying a foundation for the language development efforts that are currently underway as well as providing broad and extensive coverage as is appropriate for a documentation project. Emphasis would be given to the four varieties that are already working together closely, but reasonable effort would be expended to include others as well.

Some of the documentation would be in the form of videotaping of texts both in natural contexts (including conversations) and as readings of written essays. Some of it would be in the form of audio recording of texts and such vocabularies and paradigms as result from the description. In this area, given the number of varieties, it will be important to engage the cooperation (already pledged) of key Me'phaa men and women to collect and transcribe the material (something that they have already shown that they can do). The recording would be done according to best practices (Bird & Simons 2003, E-MELD; see also publications from the SOAS program such as Nathan 2008) using digital recorders and cameras set for appropriate sampling rate, as has been done in the past (WAV format, 44.1KHz or higher in the case of audio). (Unlike what was done for the video recordings of Seri, which were done with a conventional camcorder and boom mike, the plan would be to use a camcorder that records onto a hard drive (MPEG2 format), and a Bluetooth microphone.) The most important part is to obtain and archive a good amount of text material that is given a free translation (first into Spanish, by the collaborators, then into English, by the PI), and also a literal translation (likewise in Spanish and English). The data (using Unicode characters, in the case of texts) would be backed-up and stored according to best practices, to ensure long-lived usefulness

and accessibility, and then archived (probably with the Archive of the Indigenous Language of Latin America in Austin).

The textual materials will be complemented by a significant amount of descriptive work that interplays with the same by relating the syntactic constructions in the texts to the syntactic constructions described in published work by Suárez, Wichmann, and Carrasco, as well as with the unpublished work by Weathers that has been offered to be made available. Likewise, paradigmatic material would be produced. It is envisioned that an interesting product would be to produce paradigms focused on key topics (possession, agreement, aspect, etc.) in one or more varieties (but not necessarily all), sometimes for purposes of comparison and sometimes not. (The collaborators have already shown ability and interest in doing this.)

Of course a detailed description of the phonology, including the tones, will be an important part of this project. It needs to be done in a way that meets the needs of the local community as well as the academic community, and it will need to be done in both Spanish and English. Minimal descriptions of this sort (which would be expanded greatly in this case) are found in the *Ilustraciones Fonéticas de Lenguas Amerindias* (see Marlett et al. 2006, for example), some of which have also been published in the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* (see Marlett et al. 2005, for example). A short version and a long version of these descriptions are anticipated, and they would focus on at least four varieties simultaneously. (A draft of the short version was started, during the 2009 Me'phaa workshop, convincing the P.I. that such is possible as well as desirable.)

It is not the plan to include actual dictionary work in this project, but it would be possible and important to lay the foundation for such work by setting up a centralized lexical database into which individual varieties would contribute and from which they could spin off local-variety-appropriate dictionaries, and from which a comparative lexicon could be produced — a product that would be of relevance to comparative and historical linguistic work for years. This product would be a central goal of the project. What software is appropriate for doing this piece of the project has not been determined. A couple of examples of what this comparative lexicon might look like are included in figure 1. Since the practical orthography established by the language communities themselves is quite transparent and entirely explicit with respect to tones, it serves well to bridge the needs of the local communities and those of outsiders, although a phonological field (*sans* tones because of frequent differences) could also be included

Figure 1: Sample proposed lexicon (output from database)

gobo. *V. gubo.*

gubo /**gubo**/ *s* rana (término general); frog (general term). *Ac* **gobo**, *Az* __, *Ma* **hobo**, *Su* __, *Te* **ubo**, *Tl* **gubo**.

hobo. *V. gubo.*

i'duun /**i?duũ**/ *s* correcaminos (correcaminos tropical) [*Geococcyx velox*]; roadrunner (Lesser Roadrunner). *Ac* **i'dúun**, *Az* __, *Ma* **i'dúun**, *Su* __, *Te* **i'dúun**, *Tl* **i'dúun**'.

su'suun'. *V. tsu'tsun.*

tsu'tsun /**tsu?tsũ**/ *s* colibrí (término general) [*Florisuga* sp., y otros]; hummingbird (general term). *Ac* **su'súún'**, *Az* __, *Ma* **tsu'tsún**, *Su* __, *Te* **tsu'tsún**, *Tl* **tsu'tsún**'.

ubo. *V. gubo.*

as shown in figure 1 using material collected during the 2009 Me'phaa workshop. (Of course, these examples are also quite simple.)

It is anticipated that the grammatical description would be drafted in Spanish in order to include the Me'phaa collaborators to the greatest level possible (and later in English) along the lines of the *Zapotec Grammar Files* that began to be published in 2008 (see Marlett 2009, and Marlett & Martínez 2009, for example). In the case of Me'phaa, given the accessibility and involvedness of the Me'phaa collaborators, the data in the “grammar files” write-ups would be represented through audio recordings as well as the written form. (WAV files would be archived, but they would be converted to MP3 files for on-line publication.) These grammar files are archived in xml format, with ISO 639-3 codes automatically embedded with each. (The codes would need to carry extra tags in order to keep track of any varieties that are not registered separately.)

At each step of the documentation and description part of the project, the question will be asked as to how the work can help the local language development that is taking place. For example, at the 2009 Me'phaa workshop it was discussed how thematic essays (see figure 2) that were produced could be used to encourage young people to read and write, and how these could be distributed electronically as well as on paper.

Figure 2: Sample of a very short text (about the roadrunner) written recently by a Me'phaa writer during a training workshop

Ká'nii jnii í'dúun

Í'dúun ñajuun' mbáa ñu'un mijxkuii o béjxi. Mbá' síyúu'. Mbá' xuráun'. Xú'kui-má grígú mbá xna' náa edxu. Matayaa nanóingoo náa kambaa, xú'kui-má dí xájúun' ségrígú sídán', mangaa-má xkuíyá e'ni jmaa.

Nanguá kijxi sídán'. Mú dí narajxkáá, gii kijxi najka grígu imba ixí.

Dí ajmúu o a'óo na'ni: "mmm', mmm', dúun, dúun".

Dí na'ku í'dúun ñajuun' sígá' dí kajtuun' náa kambaa. Na'kuun sí'bu.

Dí nuti xabu jmaa numuu dí nandxa'wá: Nuti, mú dí nitayáa o nitadxawín ndxa'wá, nuti xabu dí nandi'yoo. Xú'kui-má nuti xabu mangaa, mú dí mī'síí í'dúun, mawáán isaa' gá'ni.

The work will be undertaken collaboratively with Me'phaa men and women as co-authors, respecting and carefully guarding all of their rights as co-creators of the intellectual property that is being produced. This issue has already been discussed with them relating to work that is currently underway.

The project would be carried out by the P.I. living most of the time in Tlapa, Guerrero. IRB matters would be handled through the University of North Dakota where the PI has a formal relationship (as adjunct professor) and where IRB permissions for previous projects have been processed. Appropriate visas (FM3) to do this work would be obtained, as they have been for previous work in Mexico. The plan would be to use twelve months to complete the project.

All material produced would be archived with the Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (Austin) or a similar archive, besides being published in appropriate outlets (primarily electronically, with recordings).

References

- Apolinar Antonio, Benito et al. In preparation a. Vocabulario básico en Me'phaa. [A compilation of some seventy words in several varieties, with recordings.]
- Apolinar Antonio, Benito et al. In preparation b. Me'phaa. [A short comparative phonological write-up of the IPA illustration genre.]
- Bird, Steven & Simons, Gary. 2003. Seven dimension of portability for language documentation and description. *Language* 79(2): 557-582.
- Campbell, Lyle. 1975. Subtiaba 1974. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 41.1: 80-84.
- Campbell, Lyle. 1997. *American Indian languages: The historical linguistics of Native America*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carrasco Zúñiga, Abad. 1995. Estudios lingüísticos sobre el tlapaneco. *Panorama de los estudios de las lenguas indígenas de México*, (eds.) Leonardo Manrique, Yolanda Lastra & Doris Bartholomew. Volume 2, 277-301. Ediciones Abya-Yala: Quito.
- Carrasco Zúñiga, Abad. 2006. *Procesos morfofonológicos de la lengua me'phaa*. Master's thesis. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.
- Comité de Desarrollo de la Lengua Mè'phàà. 2001 manuscript. Vocabulario de todas las variantes dialectales de la lengua mè'phàà (sustantivos, adjetivos, adverbios y Pronombres). *Congresos de Desarrollo Lingüístico de la Lengua Mè'phàà*; Promovido por las Jefaturas y Zonas de Supervisión Escolar del Área Mè'phàà. Tlacoapa, Guerrero.
- Comité de Desarrollo de la Lengua Mè'phàà. 2003. Base de datos de los nombres de municipios y pueblos mè'phàà de todas las variantes. *Congresos de Desarrollo Lingüístico de la Lengua Mè'phàà*; Promovido por las Jefaturas y Zonas de Supervisión Escolar del Área Mè'phàà. Tlacoapa, Guerrero.
- Comité de Desarrollo de la Lengua Mè'phàà. 2004 manuscript. Base de datos de los verbos en todas las variantes. *Congresos de Desarrollo Lingüístico de la Lengua Mè'phàà*; Promovido por las Jefaturas y Zonas de Supervisión Escolar del Área Mè'phàà. Tlacoapa, Guerrero.

- Dryer, Matthew S. 1989. Large linguistic areas and language sampling. *Studies in Language* 13:257-92.
- Egland, Steven. 1978. La inteligibilidad interdialectal de las lenguas indígenas de México: Resultado de algunos sondeos. Mexico City: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.
- E-MELD: <http://cf.linguistlist.org/cfdocs/emeld/school/index.html>.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. 2009. Tlapanec languages. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 05 Sep. 2009 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/597484/Tlapanec-languages>>.
- INALI (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas). 2008. Catálogo de de las lenguas indígenas nacionales: variantes lingüísticas de México con sus autodenominaciones y referencias geoestadísticas. January 14. Diario Oficial. Mexico City.
- INEGI (Insituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. 2005. <http://cuentame.inegi.gob.mx/impresion/poblacion/lindigena.asp>. Accessed 29 August 2009.
- Lehmann, Walter. 1920. Zentral-Amerika. Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde.
- Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International.
- Marlett, Stephen A. 2009. Possession. *The Zapotec Grammar Files*, eds. Cheryl A. Black, H. Andrew Black, & Stephen A. Marlett. [<http://www.sil.org/mexico/WorkPapers/WP001-PDF/PossessionZapotec.pdf>]
- Marlett, Stephen A. & Martínez, Valerie. 2009. Nouns. *The Zapotec Grammar Files*, eds. Cheryl A. Black, H. Andrew Black, & Stephen A. Marlett. [<http://www.sil.org/mexico/workpapers/WP001-PDF/NounsZapotec.pdf>]
- Marlett, Stephen A.; Moreno Herrera, F. Xavier & Herrera Astorga, Genaro G. 2005. Seri. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 35.1: 117-121.
- Marlett, Stephen A.; Moreno Herrera, F. Xavier & Herrera Astorga, Genaro G. 2006. Seri. *Ilustraciones fonéticas de lenguas amerindias*, ed. by Stephen A. Marlett. Lima: SIL International and Universidad Ricardo Palma.
- Nathan, David. 2008. Digital archives: essential elements in the workflow for endangered languages documentation.' *Language Documentation and Description*, 5.

- Oltrogge, David & Rensch, Calvin R. 1977. Two studies in Middle American comparative linguistics. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics and University of Texas at Arlington.
- Radin, Paul. 1933. Notes on the Tlappanecan [sic] language of Guerrero. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 8(1): 45-72.
- Radin, Paul. 1940. Notes on Schultze-Jena's Tlappanec. *Boletín Bibliográfico de Antropología Mexicana* 4.70-4.
- Rensch, Calvin R. 1977. Classification of the Otomanguean languages and the position of Tlapanec. In Oltrogge & Rensch, 58-108.
- Sapir, Edward. 1925. The Hokan affinity of Subtiaba in Nicaragua. *American Anthropologist* 27(3): 402-435; and 27(4), 491-527.
- Schultze-Jena, Leonhard. 1938. Bei den Azteken, Mixteken und Tlapaneken der Sierra Madre del Sur von Mexiko. *Indiana III*. Jena: Gustav Fischer.
- Suárez, Jorge A. 1979. Observaciones sobre la evolución fonológica del tlapaneco. *Anales de Antropología* 16: 371-86.
- Suárez, Jorge A. 1983. La lengua tlapaneca de Malinaltepec. Mexico City: UNAM.
- Suárez, Jorge A. 1986. Elementos gramaticales otomangues en tlapaneco. *Language in a global perspective: Papers in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Summer Institute of Linguistics 1935-1985*, (ed.) Benjamin F. Elson, 267-284. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Suárez, Jorge A. 1988. Tlapaneco de Malinaltepec, Guerrero. *Archivo de Lenguas Indígenas de México*. Mexico City: Colegio de México.
- Weathers, Mark L. & Carrasco Zúñiga, Abad. 1989. *Xó nitháán mè'phàà: Cómo se escribe el tlapaneco*. Mexico City: Editorial Cuajimalpa.
- Wichmann, Søren. 1993a. A semantic framework for the Azoyú Tlapanec iterative. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 25: 125-142.
- Wichmann, Søren. 1993b. Spatial deixis in Azoyú Tlapanec. *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* 46.2: 113-132.
- Wichmann, Søren. 1996a. Description and typology of some grammatical categories in Azoyú Tlapanec. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Copenhagen.

- Wichmann, Søren. 1996b. The degrammaticalization of agentivity in Tlapanec. Content, expression and structure, (eds.) Elisabeth Engberg-Pedersen, Michael Fortescue, Peter Harder, Lars Heltoft & Lisbeth Falster Jakobsen, 3-360. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Wichmann, Søren. 2005. Tlapanec cases. Conference on Otomanguan and Oaxacan languages, March 19-21, 2004, (eds.) Rosemary Beam de Azcona & Mary Paster, 133-145. Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley.
- Wichmann, Søren. 2006. Sandhi tonal interno en la morfología verbal tlapaneca. Memorias del VIII Encuentro Internacional de Lingüística en el Noroeste, vol. 2, (ed.) Rosa María Ortiz Ciscomani, 337-55. Hermosillo: Editorial UniSon.
- Wichmann, Søren. 2007. The reference-tracking system of Tlapanec: between obviation and switch reference. *Studies in Language* 31.4: 801-827.
- Wichmann, Søren. 2008. Case relations in a head-marking language: verb-marked cases in Tlapanec. *The handbook of Case*, (eds.) Andrej Malchukov & Andrew Spencer, 797-807. Oxford: Oxford University Press.